[Information on gwan kwoth or prophets are filed according to their functions under category 791 or 792.]

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[Information on leopard skin chiefs or priests are filed according to their functions under category 624, 791 or 793.]

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554 pass them by because sacred powers often give a man prestige from which he may attain local eminence as an important elder, if they are combined with wealth, ability, and wide kinship connexions.

554 613 231 791 Next to prophets and leopard-skin chiefs the ritual status that carries with it most prestige is that of the *wut ghok*, the Man of the Cattle. Certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle and are asked to cure sick beasts and to make barren cows fruitful, though only some members of these lineages use their powers. Like leopard-skin chiefs, Men of the Cattle are often members of stranger lineages and not of the aristocratic clan of their tribe. I was told that their curse is feared, as it can be directed to the cattle, and that Nuer do not care to offend them, but, outside tradition, I have not recorded any occasion of its utterance. Apart from the few Men of the Cattle who play a part in the regulation of Age-sets (see Chap. VI), and those who are sometimes consulted about migration to new pastures, they have no public functions. One *wut ghok* of the Eastern Gaajok became very rich and powerful a generation ago, but his prestige was largely due to his possession of magic.

554 613 791 Besides the *kuaa muon*, who has a ritual relationship to the earth, and the *wut ghok*, who has a ritual relationship to the cattle, there are a number of totemic specialists whose ritual connexion with lions, crocodiles, weaver birds, &c., enables them to influence the behaviour of these creatures. A totemic specialist is a possessor (*gwan*) of the spirit (*kwoth*) of his totem. Totemic specialists have no political significance and have no social influence in virtue of their powers alone. There is a war specialist whose duty it is to shake a spear in the face of the enemy and to deliver an invocation against them. He is known as *gwan muot*, possessor of the spear, or *ngul*, and is often, perhaps always, a member of a senior lineage of the dominant clan of the tribe, for he invokes the spear by the spear-name of the clan. There are also magicians of various kinds: leeches, diviners, owners of medicines, and owners of fetishes. Of these specialists only owners of fetishes become prominent members of their communities on account of their ritual powers. Nuer [776] are very much afraid of fetish spirits and believe them to be so powerful that they will even purchase them with cattle. A fetish-owner may become the most influential man in the village, and I have been surprised at the respect and fear with which his neighbours sometimes treat him. Nevertheless, he has no defined authority in controlling the relations of the villagers to one another nor does he represent the village in its relations with neighbouring communities.

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among his kinsmen, but added that they would not be able to keep them when his relatives at Fadoi came to spend next dry season on the Pibor.

The only way of keeping tobacco among the Nuer is to deny that one possesses it and to keep it well hidden. When I gave Deng a big lump of Anuak tobacco he managed to place a small piece of it in his pipe, but he had at once to distribute the rest of it. When I used to give tobacco to youths at Yakwac they generally took a small piece for immediate use as snuff and asked me to hide the rest, so that they could come and get a bit when they wanted it without any one knowing that they possessed it. I had hiding-places all over my tent. No Nuer can resist the pleadings of his kinsman for tobacco. Age-fellows do not even ask for snuff or tobacco, but, if they find it in a man's byre, they just take it. My own system was to give away at the first opportunity anything I possessed which Nuer might covet and to rest in poverty and peace. Arab merchants are driven almost crazy by Nuer demands for gifts, but they generally speak Nuer well and have considerable knowledge of Nuer habits and so are able to hold their own. Nevertheless I have often observed that they make gifts where no return is to be expected.

Nuer are most tenacious of their rights and possessions. They take easily but give with difficulty. This selfishness arises from their education and from the nature of kinship obligations. A child soon learns that to maintain his equality with his peers he must stand up for himself against any encroachment on his person and property. This means that he must always be prepared to fight, and his willingness and ability to do so are the only protection of his integrity as a free and independent person against the avarice and bullying of his kinsmen. They protect him against outsiders, but he must resist their demands on himself. The demands made on a man in the name of kinship are incessant and imperious and he resists them to the utmost.

XIII

Some personal recollections and general impressions were recorded in the last section in order that it might be understood what are Nuer feelings about authority. It is the more remarkable that they so easily submit to persons who claim certain supernatural powers. Fetishes are a recent introduction to Nuerland and they inspire much apprehension among the people, so that, in recent years, their owners have often won prestige in their villages and made themselves feared in their

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districts, and occasionally even in large tribal sections. These fetish owners are not, however, in any sense tribal leaders and cannot compare in social importance with the prophets.

Owing to the fact that Nuer prophets had been the foci of opposition to the Government they were in disgrace and the more influential of them under restraint or in hiding during my visits to Nuerland, so that I was not able to make detailed observations on their behaviour.[1] Without discussing Nuer religious categories it may be said that a prophet is a man who is possessed by one of the sky-spirits, or Gods, whom Nuer regard as sons of the Sky-god. Nuer have great respect for these spirits and fear, and readily follow, those whom they possess. Prophets, consequently, achieved greater sanctity and wider influence than any other persons in Nuer society. A prophet is known as *guk* and is sometimes referred to as *cok kwoth*, an ant of God. He also comes into the general category of *gwan kwoth*, possessor of a spirit.

The first prophet to have gained great influence appears to have been Ngundeng who died in 1906. He was a Lou tribesman of the GAATLEAK clan and an immigrant from the Eastern Jikany. He had practised as a leopard-skin chief before he had acquired a reputation as a prophet by prolonged fasts and other erratic behaviour, by his skill in curing barrenness and sickness, and by his prophecies. Women came to him to be made fruitful from all over Lou, from the Eastern Jikany tribes, and even from the west of the Zeraf and Nile. Many brought oxen which Ngundeng sacrificed to Deng, the Sky-god which possessed him. He then anointed them with his spittle. When small-pox threatened the Lou he went out to meet it and to stay its advance by sacrifice of oxen. He foretold cattle epidemics and other events and led expeditions against the Dinka.

When Ngundeng died, the spirit of Deng eventually entered his son Gwek, who began to prophesy and to cure barrenness and sickness, as his father had done. However, he never displayed the pathological qualities of his father, who appears to have been a genuine psychotic. The spirit of Deng had passed over his elder brothers, or did not long reside in them. Nuer say that a spirit eventually returns to the lineage of the man whom it first

[1] The Government has always looked askance at prophets and opposed their influence. See, for some pejorative references to them, Jackson, op. cit., pp. 90–1; Fergusson, Appendix to Jackson, p. 107; C. A. Willis, 'The Cult of Deng', *S.N. and R.*, vol. xi, 1928, p. 200.

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in arranging for its boys to be initiated. After the operation the boys live in partial seclusion and are subject to various taboos. This is a time of mild licence and they pass out of it by a special rite. On the day of the cutting, and on the day of the passing out of seclusion, sacrifices are made and there is festivity, which includes licentious horseplay and the singing of lewd songs. Only age-mates of the father of the initiate in whose homestead the feasting takes place attend it: others keep at a distance lest they see the nakedness of their kinswomen and mothers-in-law.

II

All boys initiated during a number of successive years belong to a single age-set (*ric*). There has, till recently, been a four-year interval between the end of one such set and the commencement of the next. These four years are known as the time 'when the knife is hung up', and at the end of that period it is said 'the knife is brought out' and boys may then be initiated again. A certain *wut ghok*, 'Man of the Cattle', is, in each tribe, responsible for opening and closing the initiation periods and thereby dividing the sets. He performs the appropriate rite in his district, and when the news goes round other districts begin or cease initiation. He derives prestige from his functions, but they are ritual and give him no political authority. Sometimes, in Western Nuerland, they are performed by a prophet, but it is possible that in these cases the prophet is also a Man of the Cattle. The age-sets are organized independently in each tribe, at any rate in the larger tribes, but it often happens that when a new set has been started in one tribe an adjacent tribe will follow its lead, so that the names and periods of sets in neighbouring tribes are frequently the same. Also, though in different parts of Nuerland the names of the sets are different and the open and closed periods do not coincide, it is easy for a man who moves from one part to another to perceive in which set he would have been initiated had he been brought up in that part of the country.

To-day there are no closed periods and boys are initiated every year. The Man of the Cattle announces every few years that he is about to cut the sets and performs a ceremony by which all

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MAN OF GOD. RIAG LOINYJOK (*see p. 215*)

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query and is an abstract idea which they cannot explain in terms of specific examples; but this does not cause confusion to them because, although all aspects of their religion are an indirect extension of the idea of *kwoth*, there is a special terminology which refers to every kind of manifestation and category.

For example, there are, as will be seen later, *kolangni*, special spiritual forms which come into the possession of and possess individuals or kinship groups, and of these there are many different types of manifestation. They are often the cause of physical illness or misfortune. A particular individual may be subject to epileptic fits or periods of mental instability, and speaking in general terms the Nuer will say *teke kwoth*, 'he *has* or is possessed by *kwoth*'; but they will usually go further and qualify this statement by saying that he is possessed by some particular manifestation of *kwoth* which has a definite name. In some cases the individual will have called upon himself evil effects (though the same spirit may equally bring beneficial effects) in angering the spirit by some action, or more probably by failure to carry out some ritual obligation. There are special functionaries whose duty, in return for fees paid, usually in cattle, is first to diagnose the cause of the trouble and then to suggest a remedy, often assisting in the ritual which follows.

Kwoth is sometimes spoken of in the rôle of creator, but creation is more often explained in mythology by reference to ancestors. Such ancestors are not consciously thought of as manifestations of *kwoth*, although their origin would be explained as *kwoth*.[1] Ancestors are intermediaries between man and God; prayer is offered through them to *kwoth*. There is therefore a close relation between the concept of *kwoth* and religious practices associated with a patrilineal descent group. The word *thek* is used to express the idea of respect to ancestral spirits, and also, by extension, respect for kinship relations. Misfortunes and illness, sometimes referred to as *nueer*, are often believed to be caused by ancestral spirits who are angered on account of a breach of observance—such as neglect of prayers, which should be addressed to them—or by actual relations between living descendants. An offensive action against a kinsman demands not only some compensation in the form of apology or even material indemnification but also prayer and expiation. There is therefore a religious sanction for kinship obligations and observances.[2]

[1] E.g. when asking Nuer to relate their genealogies, one often finds that they get stuck at a particular ancestor—and there is, of course, always an ancestor beyond whom they cannot go. Pressed for an answer they will simply say that this man came from *kwoth*.

[2] *Thek*. A full explanation of the word *thek* is given in an article by Professor Evans-Pritchard in *Man*, Vol. XLIX, 96, 1949. He says: 'We can therefore perhaps best think of *thek* as a term indicating a category of ritual prohibition or taboo, and of *nueer* as a term commonly used both for the infringement and the sanction of this class of taboo.' My own view is that *thek* implies not only negative action in the form of prohibition or avoidance but also positive action in carrying out some observance or duty.

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Religious Functionaries and Magical Experts

We have seen that the Leopard-Skin Chief has certain duties to perform in connexion with the composition of blood-feuds and that he may be called upon to arbitrate in disputes of almost any kind. His rôle is purely that of a mediator whose powers, both ritual and secular, are brought into operation only if there is a genuine desire by the hostile parties to reach an agreement. He has no executive powers with political force behind them, although it is expected that he will attempt to intervene in the early stages of a feud, and he sometimes threatens to use his power to curse the disputants if they will not agree. Moreover, in all matters in dispute, the frequency with which he will be approached depends largely on his prestige and personality, and not merely on his hereditary status. Other persons with no hereditary ritual status might easily acquire a reputation for fairness and tact and be employed as arbitrators in minor disputes. Skill in arbitration was considered by the Nuer one of the attributes of leadership (*ruec*), and the *ruic naadh* often extended their influence into the sphere of legal disputes.[1]

There are also other kinds of ritual experts who have specific functions to perform for public welfare: fertility in man and cattle, success in hunting and fishing, in raids and warfare. In this category are the *wut ghok* or cattle expert, the *kuaar thoi*, the water expert, the *kuaar yiika*, who is mainly concerned with the fecundity of women, the *kuaar juath*, who deals with epidemic diseases among humans, the *gwan tang* or *kuaar bith*, who ensures the success of warriors in battle. These experts have regular duties to perform, a fact which distinguishes them from other categories of magical expert; they have an established ritual status in society, and are expected to carry out religious tasks which in some African tribes are less specialized or even embodied in the person of one man.[2]

Professor Evans-Pritchard has mentioned most of these experts in his writings on the Nuer, and has recorded most, but not all, of their duties. They are:

Kuaar kwac or *kuaar muon: The Leopard-Skin Chief or Land Chief*

The functions of this expert in connexion with homicide have been fully described in Chapter II. His is essentially an hereditary office,

[1] We are dealing here with the past. The functions of traditional experts are now much modified.

[2] The *reth* of the Shilluk, for example, who is, apart from his political and executive functions, generally responsible for fertility in man, cattle and crops, for success in hunting and fishing. (See Howell and Thomson, op. cit., p. 9; and *Africa*, XXII, 1952.) He is responsible, however, for these matters as affecting the whole tribe. There is also among the Shilluk a number of specialists responsible for local interests, *jal yath*, *ajwogo*, &c.

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but all members of the lineage do not practise. Professor Evans-Pritchard has listed his functions as:

(i) Anything to do with the land—especially the welfare of crops.
(ii) A limited rôle in rain-making and the regulation of the weather.
(iii) The ritual of homicide (see Chapter II).
(iv) The ritual of incest (see Chapter III, Section 3).
(v) The ritual of preventing feuds and protecting warriors on raiding expeditions.
(vi) Arbitration in all kinds of disputes.

Wut ghok: The Cattle Expert

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This is also an office the potentiality of which runs in certain families, and it is to that extent hereditary. The functions of the *wut ghok* are purely ritual and, apart from cattle, are concerned with the social processes of the age-grade system.

Other functions may be listed as follows:

(i) To increase the fertility of cattle and milk production and to ensure that cows give birth to cow-calves. To avoid cattle disease.
(ii) To perform the ritual of warfare, and in particular to ensure that many cattle are captured in raids.
(iii) To perform fecundity rites for women and to assist elderly spinsters to secure husbands.

As in the case of the *kuaar muon*, the *wut ghok* is concerned with activities which are both beneficial and widespread. I only know of two cases brought before the court where a *wut ghok* was alleged to have used his powers for personal gain or for revenge upon the cattle of an enemy. One of these cases caused something of a sensation and considerable animosity.

Kuaar thoi: The Water Expert

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A hereditary office running in certain lineages, sometimes of reputed extraneous origin (probably Shilluk or Anuak or what the Nuer call Bar). The *kuaar thoi* may be called upon to bless raiding parties and to perform ritual to ensure that they do not drink of water poisoned by the enemy. His principal function, however, is to bless the water, and to see that there is an abundance of fish and that the people are successful in catching them. He also performs ritual against crocodiles, and is indeed particularly associated with crocodiles and often called *kuaar nyang* (crocodile expert). A *kuaar thoi* is often called in to assist when cattle are fording a river. To ensure that crocodiles do not attack them, he takes a pole which he thrusts into the reeds along the bank and places on this an iron ring. He then takes a sheep, ties its legs

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and thrusts it into the river alongside the pole, calling upon the crocodiles to desist. This is, in fact, a common practice, since some Nuer are bound to cross rivers or crocodile-infested waterways in the course of the dry season migration.

Kuaar juath

The badge of this office is a cow-skin which he beats with a stick, and by performing this and other forms of ritual the *kuaar juath* stops the spread of disease among humans (notably small-pox). This office is also hereditary.

Kuaar yiika

The badge of this office is the *yiik* or woman's mat. The *kuaar yiika* is called in to arbitrate in cases where a woman dies in childbirth and *thung yiika* is demanded. Some Leopard-Skin families claim that this is their duty and that the *kuaar yiika* is only an assistant who should help in a subordinate capacity.

Gwan tang (*sometimes kuaar tang*)[1]

The word *tang* means 'spear-shaft'. The *gwan tang* is particularly concerned with the success of raiding parties and the performance of elaborate ritual to avoid spear-wounds to the warriors. Part of the ritual process is to break off the tip of the spear-shaft and cast it in the direction of the enemy. Some of these specialists are known as *gwan bith* (*bith* means fish-spear), but I know of only one family which claims this distinction, and their functions and the ritual they perform appear to be identical with those of the *gwan tang*.

Many of the functions of these various experts appear to overlap. This is true in general terms, but closer analysis will, I think, show that they are not identical. Thus the *kuaar kwac*, the *wut ghok*, the *kuaar thoi* and the *gwan tang* are all concerned with cattle raids and warfare. The *kuaar kwac*, however, is expected to ensure success in a more general and unspecified way, the *wut ghok* has specifically the duty of seeing that the raiders are successful in capturing cattle, the *kuaar thoi* is expected to protect them from poisoned water, and the *gwan tang* to give them success in inflicting spear-wounds on their enemies and in avoiding injuries to themselves. The *kuaar kwac* is also expected to protect them against the ghosts of slain enemies, which is one of his specific duties in cases of homicide. All experts of this kind are known as owners of *twac* (*gwan twac—ji twac*),[2] stressing their right to wear a particular skin as a badge of office, although some of them, notably the *wut ghok*, have none; the rest of the

[1] *Kuaar* is best translated as 'expert', though the word 'chief' is more often used; *gwan* (father) here simply means 'owner or possessor of'.

[2] *Twac* is a generic term for skin: *kwac* means leopard-skin, *thoan* serval cat-skin, and so on.

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●791 721 people who have no such distinction are known as *dwek*. There is no suggestion of a caste system or, indeed, any social distinction, but only of the possession of a special ritual status in society which is emphasized by the hereditary nature of their functions and in tribal tradition and mythology.

I do not propose here to discuss in great detail the part played by these experts in legal procedures. We have already seen that the *kuaar kwac* or *kuaar muon* had special functions to perform as a mediator in blood-feuds and in other forms of dispute. The *kuaar yiika*, though his functions were almost purely ritual, was called in when an unmarried woman died in childbirth as a result of illicit sexual intercourse. Yet it would not be true to say that the *wut ghok* intervened in disputes concerning cattle for his functions were entirely ritual. This applies also to other kinds of religious functionary and, as will be seen later, magical experts of other categories. It is, however, true to say that any man of influence would intervene in disputes, both between individuals and between lineages or tribal segments, and since possession of spiritual attributes brings influence of this sort, doubtless such experts played their part in political and legal affairs. Again, it is necessary to stress that these observations, though still partially true, concern principally the past. It will be obvious that whatever political and legal functions were performed by these people in the old days are now much modified by the introduction of modern tribunals with the sanction of government action behind them.

Other Types of Religious Expert

791 Religious experts of the second category have no analogous traditional status or specialization of social and economic function, although in most cases their position becomes hereditary. These are the *ji kuthni* (sing. *gwan kwoth*), of which there are many kinds. The first are the possessors of 'sky-spirits'—direct and identified manifestations of *kwoth*—some of whom gained considerable political power and widespread fame during the last century. Professor Evans-Pritchard speaks of these as 'Prophets', and suggests that the concept was of Dinka origin. Many of these prophets were themselves of Dinka extraction.

It must be remembered that the great majority of these people gained no widespread prestige and had no political influence at all, their activities being limited to the ordinary ritual divination and diagnosis of the cause of the minor misfortunes which beset the individual. Nowadays they are unlikely to gain any extensive political power, although there are many who have exceptional influence over the Nuer, and it is interesting to note that they are never brought forward as possible representatives of the people to the Government. For example, there is a *gwan kwoth* called Macar Teng, who lives in comparative

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isolation among the few Gaawar who occupy the southern and almost inaccessible part of the Zeraf island, and has considerable influence over Gaawar affairs. Another, Riak Loinyjok,[1] commonly called by his bull name, *tut me bor*, has recently acquired tremendous prestige and, although he lives among the Lak, is known and visited by people from as far away as the Eastern Jikany. His activities have no political aspect, and he concerns himself with the curing of the sick.[2] These are exceptional cases; the vast majority have no such fame.

There are also owners of lesser spirits, and the multitude of persons who operate through 'talking or spirit medicines', which are described very briefly below. 'Prophets' and persons possessed of spirits and magicians of lesser importance are clearly distinguished from the *ji twac*, religious functionaries who have a traditional right to a skin (*twac*) as a badge of office. These distinctions may be summarized as follows:

(i) The *ji twac* have not only hereditary status, but status which is firmly established in tribal tradition. Their ancestors, themselves operating as *kuaar kwac*, *kuaar thoi* and the like, are figures of great repute in Nuer tribal history.[3] Other types of religious expert can acquire their powers suddenly, alleging possession by a spirit after a trance or epileptic fit, or even by purchase from someone else, but although these qualities may thereafter become hereditary, it is never a hereditary status which goes far back into the history of the lineage.

(ii) The *ji twac* have no particular manifestation or spirit linked to themselves as individuals, only ritual association with earth, cattle, water, &c., as the case may be, while the *ji kuthni* are possessed by much more definite manifestations, each of which has a distinguishing name and sometimes even a known personality.

(iii) The *ji twac* have functions to perform in connexion with the people as a whole or with natural phenomena or events which are likely to affect the whole community or the tribe. The *kuaar kwac* is associated with the land and is therefore responsible for control of the weather, the *kuaar thoi* with the abundance of fish in the waters, the *wut ghok* with the welfare of cattle. Owners of spirits are more concerned with individuals, and are approached by individuals to perform ritual tasks for them in return for an agreed fee.[4]

The distinction given above is not, of course, always crystallized. The *kuaar kwac* may, for example, be approached by an individual, who will ask him to bless his land or his wives and ensure

[1] Since the political activities of *ji kuthni* have been so severely repressed by the Government, those who now practise are usually at pains to emphasize the purely spiritual nature of their activities.

[2] See pp. 30–31.

[3] This does not mean that the *ji twac* do not also receive fees. There are recognized fees for specific functions: for example, fees paid to the *kuaar kwac* for arbitration in blood-feuds, &c.

[1] [See plate facing p. 161 -- Analyst]

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791 fertility. Moreover it is clear that those of the second category who acquire great prestige and influence often seek to misappropriate the functions and insignia of more reputable experts. There is a tendency to assume the leopard-skin. Deng Likea, Prophet of Gaawar, did so, and his son Gaw Bang—for many years President of the Bar Gaawar Court—often conducted the ritual of homicide although he had no traditional right to do so. Riak Loinyjok (mentioned above) wears the leopard-skin, though he would not be accepted as arbiter in blood-feuds. There is clearly a desire by these people to establish themselves in a ritual and traditional, and therefore more orthodox, status in society.

A *gwan kwoth* of repute will also claim that he possesses or is possessed by a large number of different spirits, not a single spirit. Deng Likea, whose principal spirit was called Diu, possessed many others, and he married a wife in the name of each. His sons are usually referred [551] to first by their own names and then by the name of the spirit in whose name the mother of each was married, and not by that of their father, according to normal Nuer custom. Thus Deng Likea's sons were called Macar Diu, Gaw Bang, and so on.

There is a large number of different categories of spirit owners: owners of 'sky-spirits' (*kuth mial*), owners of 'spirits' of the wind (*kuth dange*), owners of 'earth spirits' (*kuth piny*) and 'talking medicines', these last being divided into a large variety of different forms, and finally, possessors of *wal*, medicine, which is usually present in more tangible form.

It is not within the scope of this book to describe at length the multitudinous concepts concerning *goah* and *kolangni*. *Goah* is said to be of Dinka origin, while *kolangni* are essentially Nuer. Under these two main headings are numerous spirits which have special names—*biel*, *maluth*, *gulung*, *mathiang*, &c.,—and special characteristics. The spirits are used to assist in the diagnosis of ills and misfortunes, the possessor acting as a medium and often going into a trance at a seance attended by a considerable number of people. The spirit is said to speak from the mouth of the medium, from a special pot or gourd, from the ground, or sometimes only through dreams.

789 *Wal* is a word which has the more literal meaning of medicine, since it is also applied to herbs, purges, and astringents as well as nowadays 754 to medicines supplied by the government medical service. In this connexion it refers to magic roots and sometimes to other objects which have intrinsic magical power and which are operated by the performance of ritual for some specific purpose. There are different forms of *wal* (one called *nyuth*, for example, is believed to be particularly potent and also dangerous), but the Nuer do not consider themselves to be experts in their use, and regard them as being of foreign origin. In fact such roots are usually obtained from other tribes, and a Nuer will sometimes go on a special journey to purchase them.

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They can be and are used for beneficial purposes, but they are associated more often with the practice of witchcraft, and owners of such medicines are often greatly feared. This fear has perhaps been particularly impressed on the Nuer by the action of the Government in banning the possession of roots or medicines and inflicting severe penalties on their owners, whether they were believed to use them for good magic or for witchcraft. This reaction has not applied so much to the ownership of spirit medicines, presumably because, being for the most part entirely incorporeal, there was no proof of possession, and Government intervention was therefore much more difficult. Spirit medicines, *kolangni* and the like, can none the less be used for anti-social purposes, although they are normally regarded as beneficent and used as such.

A further category of Nuer magic experts is the *tiet*, who have special powers of divination,[1] but their techniques are not usually dependent on a particular spirit manifestation or on possession of a medicine. Their methods are more mundane in character, for they often use cowrie shells or pebbles, which are cast on the ground, and an interpretation is given of the formation in which they fall.

Beneficial and Anti-social Activities

We see, therefore, that the functions of all these experts are generally considered to be beneficial; those of the *ji tuac* to the people as a whole; those of other experts or possessors of spirits and medicines to their individual clients. Their power can, however, be used for purely anti-social purposes. The *ji tuac* have the power to curse by invoking the element or object with which they are particularly associated. We have seen that the Leopard-Skin Chief may call a curse upon those who refuse to listen to his exhortations in connexion with blood-feuds and homicide,[2] but he is not expected to do so for his own benefit or from personal animosity. Similarly the *wut ghok*, who has the power to benefit the people by ensuring the good health and fertility of their cattle, can also curse their cattle. Yet none of these religious functionaries can be regarded

[1] *Tiet*: a common Nilotic word used to cover a very large variety of magical experts.

[2] In connexion with warfare and cattle raids they are expected to work magic against other tribes; to make the infliction of wounds upon them easy; to destroy or weaken their defences. This is not witchcraft so far as the Nuer are concerned, for their action is pro-Nuer and to them in no sense anti-social. The definitions of witchcraft is here relative. It will also apply to cases of warfare against other Nuer tribes or even tribal segments. An expert who performs ritual to bring about the downfall of enemies in another tribal section is acting in the interests of his own tribal section. His action is beneficial magic to his own people, black magic to those of the opposing segment, and there is no formalized community to which both belong and which would conventionally react against his performance. His action is not witchcraft in the more exact definition of the term. Nefarious practices against an individual or even a kinship group within the community are a different matter, because there is a body of collective opinion which considers such action anti-social and, as we shall see in the next section, is prepared to take collective steps to remove the danger.

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as a sorcerer or witch in normal circumstances. Similarly, other categories of magicians and spirit-owners are generally expected to act in the interests of their clients, although in some cases the client may, by paying a fee, gain the assistance of one of them to work witchcraft against his private enemy. Some spirit-owners have an unsavoury reputation in Nuerland. There are, however, persons whose activities are considered entirely anti-social, and who thus fall into the category of witches, whatever the circumstances.

Witchcraft

Apart from *gwan wal* or owners of medicines who have acquired an evil reputation, witches are possessors of the evil eye, called *peth* in Nuer, who are believed to cause harm and even death to those who cross their path in anger, and sometimes without any motive at all other than the inherent evil of their personalities. The *rodh* or ghoul is also a kind of witch who is particularly associated with the performance of hideous rites upon the bodies of the newly dead, thereby gaining some control over the souls of their surviving relatives.[1]

In the common action of the community against witchcraft we find perhaps the only conception among the Nuer which even approaches the notion of criminal or public law. Nuer say that in the past witches of these kinds were often killed with at least the tacit consent of the whole community to which they belonged. There are, however, no authenticated cases on record. The *rodh* might be killed with impunity, provided that blood was not spilt and no injuries to his head were inflicted by his assailants. The *peth* might be killed without grave danger of retaliation and, if composition was demanded, only six head of cattle need be paid to the kinsmen. It is doubtful if anything was paid in such circumstances. Accusations of the evil eye are fairly common today, but I have no details of the possessors being killed in the past.

It is worth adding that among many primitive peoples unnatural offences and bestiality are treated as public delicts and punished by ostracism, exile, or even death. Such offences are conspicuous by their absence among the Nuer. During several years in Nuerland I only heard of one actual instance. This occurred in Gaawar country, where a headman of considerable standing admitted such an offence with a cow. This was regarded as a grave misfortune, though the reaction was one of pity for the culprit rather than indignation. It was held that both he and the cow would die. As an act of expiation he cut off one of his own fingers with a spear and, accompanied by sacrifice, this was considered an effective antidote. In the absence

[1] See Howell and B. A. Lewis, 'Nuer Ghouls, a Form of Witchcraft', *S.N.R.*, 1947.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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671 583 the bridegroom. The question arises whether or not he will meet this particular claim. If pressed he will probably do so because the bride's family might terminate the negotiations, though this is unlikely to happen over so remote a claim as the cow of the age-mate. In the second place the bride's father is concerned with his age-mate, and here there is an element of reciprocal exchange.[1] A cow is not given to all age-mates of the bride's father, only to one who has a particularly close connexion with him and has probably undergone with him the ritual processes of initiation which impart a mystical association analogous to kinship. We see therefore that the custom is a complicated one involving two separate transactions and subject to different sanctions. If a dispute over this payment reached a Nuer court, payment would in most instances be enforced. When there are sufficient precedents to constitute a consistent application of a custom of this sort, we should be justified in speaking of the claim as a legal and enforceable right.

671 791 Again, certain categories of magical experts are entitled to a fee for their services. Such claims often appear before the courts. The court will consider the circumstances, estimate whether the alleged benefits have been received or not, and if necessary order the client to pay the fee. The transaction is in the nature of a contract which is now enforceable in law. In the past the sanctions were retaliatory, though in this particular instance forceful retaliation would be unlikely since more commonly the magician's supernatural powers, which might be used against his client, would be feared.

671 673 Compensation for wrongs, recognized in tradition, expressed in traditional scales, and originally a basis for compromise, is now enforced in the Courts. Adultery, for example, is a recognized wrong and one which should be rectified by the payment of a suitable indemnity. Whether or not this was paid in the past depended again on the sanctions prevailing, but nowadays the wrongdoer will in the final event be compelled to pay. This applies to other legal wrongs, such as the seduction or impregnation of unmarried girls, and theft or damage of property.

671 177 Among the Nuer there is a vast field of custom and convention which is now supported by legal sanctions and thus becomes the law. Moreover this transformation of custom into law is being carried to extremes among the Nuer, for there is an increasing tendency to treat all social customs and conventions as enforceable laws.

Throughout this discussion of Nuer customary law we have sometimes been speaking of the present, sometimes of the past. Under the influence of modern administration systems of social control are

[1] The age-mate will receive the cow if the bride's father has received a like privilege on the marriage of the age-mate's daughter or has the expectation of doing so. See p. 110 and n. 3.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

individual as he passes from infancy to old-age. Thus each person passes successively into one grade after another, and, if he live long enough, through the whole series—infant, boy, youth, young married man, elder, or whatever it may be..... In East Africa, where the age-organisation is highly elaborated, each age-set normally passes from one grade to another as a whole."[1]

In this paper we are dealing mainly with the change of status brought about by initiation from Boyhood to Manhood. Initiation involves, however, not only a change from one social grade to another but also entrance into a set in which the individual remains for the rest of his life. The members of each set have a common name, like status, and like patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior age-sets.

Among the Nilotes of the Sudan the age-set system appears to be most important among the Nuer on account of both the severity of its initiation and the social significance of the privileges associated with it. Among the Shilluk age-sets do not seem to occupy an important place in social organisation and the institution has an appearance of decay. The Seligmans record that at the time of their visit "it was of little importance and was probably dying out."[2] Among the Dinka it gives the impression of being of more importance than among the Shilluk and of less importance than among the Nuer, and the same may be said of the age-sets of the Nilo-Hamitic Bari discovered by Mr. Whitehead.[3]

The chief officer in respect to initiation into age-sets is the *wud ok* and this is in keeping with the fact that initiation largely concerns a boy's contact with the cattle. Before initiation he milks the cows and looks after the small calves and sheep and goats. After initiation he is strictly prohibited from milking the cows and he acts as herdsman to the adult cattle. During the period of initiation it is taboo for him to have any contact with the cattle and his first action on its conclusion is to re-establish this contact. After initiation also he receives a bullock or two from his father, and becomes legitimate owner of a bullock name and is permitted to dance and sing behind the bullocks.

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. *Man.* 13, 1929.

[2] C. G. and B. Z. Seligman. "The Pagan Tribes of the Southern Sudan," pp. 72-3.

[3] *Id.* pp. 170-2 and 263-4. Cf. the lengthy account of age-sets among the Nilotic Lango of Uganda by J. H. Driberg.

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From the point of view of initiation Nuer life is divided into two periods, the initiatory period and the period when no initiation may take place. These alternating periods are known as that when the knife is brought out, *ngom kam rar*, at the commencement of the period of initiation, and that when the knife is hung up, *ba ngom ngaʃ*, at the conclusion of the period. At the commencement of an initiation period the cattle-expert kills a bullock, a big dance is held, and he makes a speech opening a new period of initiation. It seems that in each tribe there is one cattle expert whose authority is recognised in matters concerning the age-set cycle.

In Gaajak country there was a serious dispute between two cattle-experts about commencing a new age-set. The privilege of giving orders for initiation had previously been in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny Riek. Owing to the fact that there was no son old enough to perform the duty it was carried out by the lineage of Jop Gai. Afterwards these two lineages appear to have taken over the duty in turn ; the lineage of Riek gave orders for the *Thut* age-set to be initiated, the lineage of Gai gave orders for the *Boiloc* age-set to be initiated and so on. When it came to the *Rialmac* age-set it was Ngweny's turn to order initiation to commence but Jop refused to allow him to officiate. In revenge Ngweny made indentations into the ceremonial knife to render it useless and uttered a curse, saying that if the knife was his right then pus would come out of the ears of Jop, whereas if the knife belonged to Jop then pus would come out of his own ears. Another informant said that the dispute was occasioned by the question whether the knife should be brought out or hung up, *i.e.*, whether the period of initiation should be opened or closed and that Ngweny said, " Let the knife now be hung up and not be taken down again till one of us has died. When one of us has died let the other order initiation to commence." Jop died and his rival initiated the *Rialmac* age-set. This same informant said that the knife will in future remain in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny since, as a result of Jop's death from the curse, his lineage would not again shoulder the responsibility.

It is the cattle-expert who gives a name to each age-set, *e.g.*, *Dangunga*, *Maker*, *Lithgac*, etc., at the end of a period of initiation and no one may then be initiated until he has opened a new period. It is believed that if a boy were to be initiated after the cattle-expert had given orders for

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881 the period to be closed his head would swell and he would die. It is possible however, if a boy is much older than the age at which Nuer generally have incisions made on their foreheads and if his family greatly desire him to be initiated, for the ceremony to take place in a neighbouring tribe where the period of initiation is still open, since not every tribe has its open and closed periods at the same time and there is often overlapping in this respect between different tribes. Thus I was told that Lou boys who insisted upon being cut at a time when the Lou were in a closed period might cross over into the adjoining Ngok Dinka country and be initiated there if it were still in an open period.

881 When the *wut ok* wishes to close an initiation period he takes a bullock
791 and rubs ashes on its back and makes a speech formally closing the age-set and starting a closed period in which no boys in the tribe may be initiated. The tip of his ceremonial knife is then placed in the fire and afterwards stowed away in a pot. The bullock, after its legs have been cut off, is divided longitudinally into halves. I believe that one half is taken by members of the set which has just been closed and the other half by the set immediately senior to them. They then eat the flesh together. However, I am not sure about this point.

Though I have spoken throughout of the *wut ok* or cattle-expert as the authority who decides upon opening and closing age-sets we are not all agreed upon this point. My own information is derived from two or three informants but it is supported by statements of Stigand and Crazzolara.[1] Jackson, on the other hand, says that as a rule the oldest surviving member of the senior existing age-set gives the order for the ceremony to be held and that it is he who initiates the first boy who should be his own son or a near relative. He adds that this man must be a leopard-skin chief and that after he has initiated the first boy the cattle-experts in each division of the Nuer are responsible for sectional arrangements.[2] Mr. Coriat also writes: "The classes are not regulated by a cattle-expert; the *wud ok* or Man of the Cattle is responsible only for the initiation ceremony itself. Age classes are now regulated and named by certain 'kwar mon,' Land Chiefs, with traditional powers."[3]

[1] Major C. H. Stigand, "Warrior Classes of the Nuers," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. I, 1918, p. 116. Pater Crazzolara, "Die Gar Zeremonie bei den Nuer," *Africa*, Vol. V, 1932, p. 28.

[2] *Op. cit*, p. 145.

[3] Privately circulated memorandum.

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262 are dura, corn, mutton, beef, the flesh of some wild animals—antelope, gazelle, waterbuck—guinea fowl, fish, crocodile—which is considered a choice food—beans, milk, and sometimes greens. This does not mean that these foods are constantly at hand. The average diet of a Nuer consists of dura, fish, milk, and occasionally meat. This limitation of diet works the greatest hardship for little children and the sick and aged.

A Nuer seldom kills a cow unless one has to be offered as a sacrifice. Sheep are not often primarily killed for food. Wild animals are not often available for they usually must be killed with a gun—and who has a gun? Even guinea fowl are not easily caught.

A Nuer will, generally speaking, not eat wild duck. Eggs are not eaten by men as they are considered effeminate. Milk is likewise not regarded as food for men, but women and children and sick men may drink it. Women refuse [84] to drink milk during their menstrual periods.

243 The staple article of food is dura, or kaffir corn as we call it. The dura is planted in May, providing the early rains have begun. If the rainy season is late the planting is delayed until the ground has been softened by several rains so that hoeing is possible. Small hand-hoes are used. Everybody hoes—men, women, and children each do their part in getting the field ready to be planted. The seed dura, which has been kept over from the past year, is sown. It requires to be hoed several times during the season, for the frequent rains make weeds grow as well as dura. In late September or early October, according to the time of planting, the dura is ready to be cut.

● [79] When harvest time approaches a 'guk kwoth' or 'prophet of god' is consulted as to when they may cut their dura, and his advice is heeded.

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THE NUER AND THE GOVERNMENT

669 177 The Nuer have occasionally had trouble which has required definite Government interference to settle it.

Several years ago the Government put on a patrol to quell an uprising in the Garjak section of Nuerland. There the Nuer saw his first aeroplane. To him it meant a huge boat that could fly and from which unseen guns could be fired. Hence they call the aeroplane the 'boat of the sky'.

669 177 791 The Nuer had great faith in one of their prophets, but when he failed to save them at this crucial time their faith in him was shattered. Again, more recently, they have been led astray by faith in another of their number—Gwek Ngundeng—and again they have found that he, too, was but a human being such as they, and no more powerful than any one of them would be.

Ngundeng, father of Gwek, had made a huge mound in the Lau section of Nuerland, and the Nuer considered this mound sacred. Many things were buried in it. But the mound was blown up by the English in the early part of their second patrol in order to shatter the Nuer faith in their god. The Nuer asked themselves—could this mound, a sacred place, be blown up? Was it possible? Then when they realized that it not only could be blown up, but had actually been destroyed, doubt entered their minds as to whether the mound had really been sacred or not.

When Ngundeng, father of Gwek, died, they then ascribed his power to his son Gwek. They had great faith in him, but when they heard that he had been killed in this patrol faith dropped to the zero point: 'Could a god be killed?' they asked. But if their faith in him died they still felt that he had been a most wonderful person, even if he were not a god. Shortly before word came of his death there had been a number of showers during the

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dry season, and as this was unusual it had occasioned much comment among the Nuer. When they heard of his death a number of them at once assigned that fact as the cause of these rains.

In December 1927 there was a total eclipse of the moon which caused much alarm among the Nuer. They felt sure that it meant destruction to them and to their country, for was it not dripping blood? Later on, when the patrol was put on in part of Nuerland, they felt that it was just the fulfilment of what they had foreseen when the moon was in eclipse.

There is a saying among the Nuer that when they have plenty to eat they want to fight. That year, too, had seen a good harvest, and fight they did. There seemed to be many personal scores and old feuds that must be attended to that year, and then they declared it was all because the moon had predicted a year of trouble for them.

Not many Nuer have any conception of a country besides their own and the land occupied by a neighbouring tribe. They recognize their chief and his authority, but do not seem to realize their need of a larger, higher governing power.

Their acquaintance with this higher authority is limited. They see their cattle taken for taxes, they usually are willing to bring their difficulties to the District Commissioner to be settled; they are willing to be relieved of their physical ailments to some extent, and usually welcome the Government doctor and his trained assistants whom he sends out during the dry season.

The Nuer does not—or says he does not—see any good in paying taxes. Some of them feel that giving their cattle up for taxes is submitting without protest to a raid from a representative of another country, and they feel that if the Government can collect taxes (or raid their

721 grain supplies, women and so forth, but it has been suggested that war between the two groups is a structural relationship.(1) The Nuer have incorporated a considerable area of Dinkaland into their own territories and have also absorbed the Dinka population: the result has been fusion and not a class structure.(2)

THE NATURE OF LAW AMONG THE NUER

The settlement of feuds is effected only when both parties to a dispute are willing to come to an agreement and apply to the leopard-skin chief as mediator. He hears the matter discussed by both sides, and then gives his opinion, which is accepted as a verdict if both parties agree to it. He cannot order a discussion or compel either party to accept a decision. Compensation in cattle, according to a recognised scale, is paid for homicide, adultery, fornication and physical injury.

754 Sorcerers are killed by individuals or groups; it does not appear that any actions are regarded as injurious to the whole community.

671 Law is relative to the positions of the parties in the social structure, and to the distance between them in the kinship, lineage, age-set and political systems. The more widely separated are the two parties to a dispute the weaker is the obligation to settle it and the more difficult the task of enforcing settlement. Unless a man resorts to self-help and is backed by powerful kinsmen and by public opinion, he has little chance of redress. Traditional modes of settling disputes, a recognition of a notion of right *(cuong)* and the acknowledgment of certain scales of compensation, form the basis of Nuer law.

RECOGNISED SOCIAL FIGURES AMONG THE NUER

The Leopard-Skin Chief (kuaar muon)

● 791 624 He is a sacred person and is believed to have a mystical association with the earth which gives him certain ritual powers to bless or curse it. His acts are mainly of a ritual nature and he has no great political authority, though some importance attaches to him since relations between groups are regulated through him;(3) his powers do not, however, normally extend beyond a tribal section. He functions are as follows:-

(a) His intervention is necessary in settling feuds and disputes. Leopard-skin chiefs sometimes prevent fights between two communities by running between the two opposing forces, hoeing up earth here and there. Probably this can only be done when the majority on both sides is unwilling to come to blows.

(b) He performs ritual to cleanse those who have broken incest rules.

(c) He has slight rain-making powers.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.131.
(2) *Ibid.*, p.125. (3) *Ibid.*, p.176.

Leopard-skin chiefs are usually men from certain lineages and, although they are not all members of the same clan, they are believed to have a kind of kinship through their office. The leopard-skin chief, unlike similar ritual officials in other Nilotic groups, does not represent or symbolise the unity and exclusiveness of any political group.

The Elders

The elders of a local community provide leadership and advice when required. Prestige and influence do not come with age alone, however; a man of outstanding reputation is called *tut* (bull), a term used to refer to men of high social standing who belong to lineages other than those of the dominant clan. A *tut* is head of a family and in charge of a homestead and a herd of cattle; he has the support of a large number of relatives and, in addition, he must be an able man with personality.

The *gat tuot* is 'the bull of the camp'. He has no defined status or authority but enjoys considerable prestige through a combination of factors - ownership of cattle, age, ritual powers, many children and relatives, personal ability and tact, and so forth. His prestige makes his personal actions and decisions influential so that, when he decides to move his homestead, others will naturally follow suit.

Districts and villages have no headmen or councils. There is not even a war leader except that, in a fight, the warriors automatically follow their most notable and brave fighters. There is thus an absence of legal institutions, official leadership and organised political activity. Evans-Pritchard writes: "their state is an acephalous kinship state...." and it is the kinship structure, in conjunction with territorial segmentation, which forms the basis of Nuer political organisation.(1)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUER TRIBAL SEGMENTS AND THE LINEAGE SYSTEM

There are at least 20 clans in Nuerland, together with a number of small lineages of Dinka origin. A Nuer clan is an exogamous group of agnates who trace their descent from a common ancestor. The clans are segmented into lineages and each lineage is further segmented. Thus, a clan is segmented into maximal lineages, the maximal lineages are segmented into major lineages, the major lineages into minor lineages and minor lineages into minimal lineages. A minimal lineage, in the case of the Nuer, consists of a descent group deriving from a great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather. Clans and lineages are distinguished by separate names, ritual symbols and honorific titles.

The political and lineage groups are not identical but there is a certain correspondence. Often they bear the same name; for example, Gaawar is the name of a tribal area, of the tribesmen inhabiting it and also of the most powerful clan in it. Like the tribe, the Nuer clan has many of the characteristics accompanying segmentation. Lineages are distinct groups only in relation to one another and there is fusion of collateral

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.181.

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respected; it is the spiritual being, the *kwoth*, which the totem stands for, which is revered. The totems are symbols or manifestations of a spirit which can be in communion with men and beasts.(1)

Totem spirits are called *kuth piny* (earth spirits) a category which includes fetishes; this is in contrast to the much more important *kuth nhial*, sky spirits. Yet, although the two categories are thus distinguished, the Nuer maintain that they worship totemic spirits and that these spirits are with god in the sky. The totem seems to be the symbol of the spirit and the spirit to be an aspect of the spirit of the sky which is connected with the various lineages and is symbolised differently in each.

Kwoth

In addition to totemic spirits, *kwoth* also refers to 'god in the sky' and can mean any one of the sons of the sky god - the *kwoth dwanga*. Each sky spirit is associated with a certain aspect of nature; for example, Deng refers to the rain spirit. Another group of spirits are the *col wic* - the spirits of persons who have been killed by lightning and taken up to heaven. Persons supposed to have been taken into heaven by a whirlwind and those found dead in the bush without any apparent cause are also *col wic*. A *col wic* is considered to be a sacred spirit of his lineage - a *kwoth goal* - and most lineages have at least one of these spirits to whom cows are dedicated. Sometimes a *col wic* spirit enters into a member of his family or lineage and, when this happens, the man whom he possesses falls sick; on recovery, he makes a shrine in his homestead and becomes a prophet of Col *(guk cuol)*, and the spirit of lightning contacts the people through him.(2)

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices play an important part in all ritual practices, and are usually all of a similar nature. An animal is selected and is dedicated to a spirit by rubbing ashes along its back. An invocation is then made and the animal is killed by spearing it through the heart. It is cut in two halves when there is a cutting of social ties, and also at mortuary ceremonies when there is one half for the living and another for the dead. Sickness is the most frequent occasion for sacrifices.

THE CONCEPTS OF THEK AND NUEER

Thek means 'to respect', and is used in various social contexts; for example, it denotes the behaviour expected of a man towards his parents-in-law; in blood feuds the kin of the slayer and of the slain may not eat from the utensils which the other party has used, and these are respected. In mortuary ceremonies a man's age-mates *thek* the meat which has been sacrificed in his honour. A man also pays respect to his totem. Failure to show respect where there is a *thek* relationship is thought to bring about misfortune.(3) Any serious sickness following the breach of a thek taboo is called *nueer*.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Annali Lateranensi*, 1949, Vol.XIII, p.247.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, *Man*, 1949, No.2, p.9.
(3) *Ibid.*, 1949, No.96, p.75.

Cien

753 775 *Cien* is the vengeance wrought by a ghost which produces sickness and misfortune; like the other Nilotic tribal groups, the Nuer hold the concept of *cien*, and believe that ghostly vengeance will fall on those who have wronged a man and allowed him to die with a grudge. Fear of *cien* tends to make a Nuer more careful to treat others with justice.

[782] To stop the effects of *cien* it is necessary to make a sacrifice to god in the sky and, when possible, to make reparation.

NUER CURSES AND GHOSTLY VENGEANCE

789 Curses are uttered by someone who has been wronged. The efficacy of a curse is largely conditioned by the relationship of the curser to the cursed. The Nuer regard the curse of a mother or father as serious; it may result in death. The curse of a mother's brother is feared because, being of a different lineage, he may curse cattle, which is the worst of all curses in the eyes of the Nuer. The curse of an eldest child is feared by the mother and maternal uncle.

There are other curses imposed by those of the *ric* (age-set), by the leopard-skin chief, the man of the cattle and *guk*, the prophet.(1) The Nuer also believe in conditional curses which may be laid on a man and become operative if he, or any of his descendants, should do a certain thing.

RITUAL PERSONS

●791 There are several ritual figures among the Nuer who are important in the village community.

1. *The Leopard-Skin Chiefs.* They have a special relationship with the earth and can affect the welfare of the crops. They also have a limited role in rain-making and in the general regulation of the weather. They conduct the rituals concerned with homicide, with cleansing the parties to incestuous relations, with preventing feuds, and protecting warriors on raiding expeditions.

2. *The But Guk.* Members of certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle; they are asked to cure cows of various diseases and to ensure the fertility of barren animals. Their role is, however, a more restricted one than that of the leopard-skin chief, who has functions relating to social as well as to natural processes. Usually the *but guk* is a member of a stranger lineage, as is the leopard-skin chief, and this is presumably an advantage when they have to mediate between powerful and antagonistic lineages.

3. *Totemic Experts.* There are a number of totemic experts whose ritual connections with lions, crocodiles, and other dangerous creatures, enable them to influence the beasts' behaviour to the advantage of the community. A totemic specialist is the possessor of the spirit of his totem; he has no political significance.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Africa*, 1940, XIII, p.389.

4. *War Specialist.* It is the duty of the war specialist to shake a spear in the face of the enemy and to make an invocation against them. The war specialist is known as the *gwan nuot*, the possessor of the spear. He is often a member of a senior lineage of the dominant clan.

5. *Magicians.* The Nuer have a number of leeches, diviners, owners of medicine and fetishes. Only the owners of fetishes obtain any considerable status, and this is because the people are afraid of fetish spirits and believe them to be so powerful that they will even give cattle to purchase them. A fetish owner may become the most influential man in the village, but he holds no special office and does not represent the village in inter-village relationships.

6. *The Gwan Buthni.* Each small lineage has its *gwan buthni* - an official who performs certain ritual services for the family members. He functions at marriages, at mortuary ceremonies, and also performs the task of severing kinship bonds when a marriage is arranged between two very distantly related people; this he does by splitting a gourd in two or cutting a sheep in half.

7. *Prophets.* A prophet is a man possessed by on of the sky spirits or gods whom the Nuer regard as sons of the sky god.(1) Since the Nuer greatly respect and reverence these spirits they fer those possessed by them. Prophets exert a wider influence than any other category of persons in the entire society. Ngundeng was the first prohet *(guk)* to gain great influence by means of his healing powers, prophecis, and prolonged fasts. He led expeditions against the Dinka and, accordingto his followers, was possessed by the sky god Deng. He built a vast pyramid of earth and ashes with a palisade of ivory tusks. Originally ach prophet's influence was confined to a small locality, but at the end ofthe nineteenth century they began to have a tribal significance and organied the opposition against the Arabs and Europeans. Eventually the wer of the more important prophets spread beyond tribal boundaries and thy came to represent the unity of a tribe or a number of tribes. This development of the political powers of individuals brought about a structural change;(2) since the sky gods passed into the sons of a prophet after his death it would appear that the hereditary principle was beginning to assert itself. The prophets were eventually suppressed by the Administration. It seems probable that, if this action had not been taken, they would have become divine kings of some sort, perhaps similar to the Shilluk *reth*. In general, the predominant interests of the Nuer in ritual matters are expressed in beliefs of a spiritual rather than a magical nature. Unlike the other Nilotes the Nuer have comparatively few magical practices; even magic coming from the west through Dinkaland tends to be spiritualised by them.

RAIN-MAKING

The Nuer attach little importance to rain-making. Any member of the Gaawar clan can act as rain-maker, since the ancestor of the clan came down from heaven holding a sprig of the *nyot* tree and a small round stone. He has no special political status or any extra prestige.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p. 181.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 189.

●791 In certain parts of Nuerland, land experts and prophets claim to be able to produce rain. In certain areas, the leopard-skin chief acts as rain-maker. The title *gwan pini* (owner of water) is given to any ritual specialist who has powers in connection with rain and floods.

The Tiet

The Nuer distinguish clearly between the prophet *(guk)* and the specialist in magic *(tiet)*. The former relies on the sky spirit which possesses and indwells him; the latter relies on various magical substances and actions. The *tiet* has a minor earth spirit, such as a totem spirit. A *tiet* is always a local specialist practising in his own community only, though a magician who possesses powerful magic *(gwan wal)* may become well known and be recognised by a whole district. All these spirits come under the general category of *kwoth* but(1) three main classes may be distinguished:

1. *Guk.* The prophet in whom a sky spirit dwells.

2. *Tiet.* A specialist in magic, acting as leech and diviner.

3. *Gwan Wal.* These are of two types: one using ordinary medicines *(wal)*; another using 'talking medicines'; the latter are owners of fetishes, since their medicines are inhabited by earth spirits known as *kulangni*.

The *tiet gweeni* (mussel shell diviner) answers questions put to him by throwing mussel shells on the convex surface of a gourd and divining from the positions into which they fall on the ground. Every mussel shell diviner has his *kwoth*, the spirit which assists him in his practice.

[755] The *Tiet Dala* cures headaches, recovers lost property, and performs magic to lessen the watchfulness of those who have stolen cattle so that the true owner may get them back again undetected. He also performs magic to ensure safe journeys and to protect warriors from danger. He [illegible] by a witch in a sick man's body.

There are also various other specialists(2) who treat barren women, important men and so forth.

NUER MEDICINES (*WAL*)

754 Most of the Nuer medicines have been borrowed from neighbouring peoples, especially from the Dinka; the Nuer, however, endow them with spirits.(3) The most powerful medicines are *kulangni* (talking medicines). Although the earth spirits in the medicines cannot compete in power with the sky spirits, the people fear the owners of fetishes and respect them. In the past a fetish owner was in great danger of being killed by avengers. He was safe among his fellow villagers, for it was believed that a man would not harm a member of his own kin and community; but if a fetish

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *S.S.A.*, 1935, Vol.XVIII, pt.1, p.67.
(2) *Ibid.*, p.70, for fuller details on Nuer magical experts.
(3) *Ibid.*

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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spirits of small lineages and their families, especially of lineages of Dinka descent. The fact that they are not found as spirits of larger lineages is perhaps further evidence of the late introduction of these spirits into Nuerland.[1] I speak here of ordinary Nuer, many, perhaps most, of whom do not in any case, particularly to the east of the Nile, have any special relationship to one or other of the spirits of the air, though they may have relationships to spirits of other kinds. In the case of prophets, their spirits are most unlikely to be forgotten and pass out of their lines of descent altogether.

Seizure of a man by a spirit may be temporary or permanent. When it is permanent the possessed person becomes a prophet. It will be simpler if I describe temporary possession first. Spirits cause sickness to their devotees and sometimes to others, and illness is often, especially in western Nuerland, attributed to them. If it is thought to be due to a spirit but there is uncertainty which particular spirit is responsible, the relatives consult a prophet or diviner to determine the responsibility, so that sacrifice may be made to the right spirit. They give it *duor*, a thing, as Nuer say—that is, they sacrifice to it to appease it. The sick man's recovery means that the spirit has released him. If he has not already done so, he then dedicates an animal to the spirit to show it that he is aware of their special relationship, and from time to time he makes sacrifice to it to let it know that he has not forgotten it. Otherwise it may cause trouble again.

I will describe what happened at a ceremony held when a youth called Galuak, of the Leek tribe, was sick on account of his having been seized by the spirit *nai*. This spirit, whom I have only heard mentioned in western Nuerland, has, as I have earlier remarked, a special association with ostriches, to which it is said to be very partial. When an ostrich is killed those who have a special relationship to the spirit tie some of its plumes to the entrances to their byres. When I asked whether *nai* would not be angry at the killing of one of its birds I was told that it cares nothing for the body of the bird, only for its plumes. Prophets of *nai* decorate the shafts of their spears with ostrich plumes. *Nai* seems to be regarded as one of the most inferior of the spirits of the air.

[1] Further evidence is the fact that while people are now often named after the spirits, especially after *deng*, these spirit-names do not occur at the upper levels of Nuer genealogies.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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It was this spirit, a particularly dangerous one, that was troubling Galuak. Nuer use the word *kap*, to take hold of or to lay hold on, to describe the possession of a man by a spirit. It was known that it was *nai* who was responsible because when the year before Galuak had a similar sickness a prophet of *nai* had divined that he was possessed by this spirit. On that occasion his family had sacrificed goats, but during the past year no sacrifice had been made or ceremony held in the spirit's honour, an omission of which Galuak's family now felt very conscious. In the circumstances a return of the spirit to Galuak might have been expected.

The same prophet had been sent for from a neighbouring village and was expected to arrive before evening. In the meanwhile Galuak's kinsmen sought high and low for a beast to sacrifice right away to *nai*. All animals in the village suitable for sacrifice had recently been killed in other ceremonies (p. 59) and the kinsmen were unable to bring back even a goat for their pains. I was told that *nai* would not, however, kill Galuak in the meantime because it would see that they were trying to find an animal. The prophet arrived, as was expected, in the evening and he was accompanied by two friends. No doubt the matter was discussed in the byre that night, but no action was taken till the following morning.

In the morning, after a talk in the byre, the persons concerned went across to the hut of Galuak's mother, Nyadang, and I was invited to accompany them as a friend of the family. Nhial, Galuak's brother, was working for me. Here the prophet was presented with five piastres—on his visit the year before he had been given a war-spear and a fish-spear. He sat with his back to the wall of the hut, and Galuak and his father, Rainen, sat on a mat facing him and with their backs to the door, which was closely drawn against the entrance to the hut. The windows had been blocked with grass so that the hut was illumined only by faint shafts of light which penetrated round the edges of the door. Even this dim light could not be seen by Galuak and his father, for skins had been placed over their heads so that they might be in total darkness. Altogether there were, besides Galuak and his father, thirteen persons in the hut, sitting with their backs to the wall. The atmosphere was stifling.

The seance began by the prophet shaking his rattle and singing. Karlual, one of Galuak's maternal uncles, also shook a rattle on one side of the prophet and one of the two friends who had

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FIG. 1
Pipe

accompanied him to the village shook a rattle on the other side. The instrument is called *jogh*, possibly a Dinka word. It is a bottle-gourd containing seeds, in this instance the seeds of a wild leguminous plant. While the rattles were being rattled and the prophet sang hymns to *nai* the congregation clapped their hands and smacked them on their thighs in accompaniment. Nuer say that they *pat*, clap, or slap, for the spirit.

After about ten minutes' singing Rainen began to have premonitory spasms. It should be noted that it was not the sick youth but his father who became possessed during the seance. A spirit takes hold of an older and experienced man in cases of this kind and uses him as a medium to make its demands known. As the singing, rattling, and clapping continued, Rainen began to twitch and shake from head to foot and then suddenly leapt into the air and fell back on to the floor of the hut where he lay stiff as though in a paroxysm. After lying tense and prostrate for a while he sat up, but shortly afterwards collapsed again. Then for about a quarter of an hour he threw himself about [illegible], writhing and shrieking as though in agony. He reminded me of a hen which has had its throat cut in the Muslim way, and is thrown on the ground to die. If the people around had not broken most of his falls he might have injured himself. As it was, he complained to me on the following day of the soreness of his arms and legs. Every now and again he barked like a dog. In describing these spasms Nuer say that the spirit wrestles (*kuer*) with the man it possesses.

At the end of a particularly violent seizure, Rainen, who in his exertions had divested himself of the skin over his head, sprang at the prophet, tore his rattle from his hands, and sat

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in front of him, shaking it violently and barking. At this point the prophet called for his pipe, and after lighting it and puffing at it for a while he began to question the spirit *nai* in Rainen, and it answered through Rainen's lips. It was very difficult to follow what the spirit said because Rainen spoke in a jerky, guttural voice very different from his usual voice and he hiccuped and barked a good deal as well. 'The speech of Rainen was wiped out (*woc*). It was pressed down his gullet.' I was, however, able to follow part of what the spirit said. It said that it was *nai* and that it wanted a gift. It had waited till Nhial had returned to the village because it knew that he would be able to provide a gift out of the wages he had received from me, and it had then taken hold of Galuak. It admitted that it had received gifts from Rainen in the past but it now wanted a final gift, and it promised that if it were satisfied now it would trouble Galuak no more. If it needed anything further it would seize another person and get it from him. It pointed out, however, that it was not the only spirit troubling Galuak. The spirit of Luak, Galuak's paternal grandfather, had also taken hold of him. This was *kwoth doar*, a nature sprite, and it was worrying Galuak because the family had not dedicated a cow of their herd to it. Both Galuak's father and mother are of Dinka descent and the family have a number of different spirits attached to them.

It was very noticeable during the ceremony how those present, [illegible] asked for tobacco, and so on. They evidently, especially the children, enjoyed the spectacle. I was surprised, however, this being the first and only ceremony of its kind I witnessed, at the familiar and off-handed way in which the prophet spoke to the spirit, calling it 'wuta', 'man'—almost 'old chap'—, bargaining with it about the oblation demanded, and insisting that when the sacrifice had been made it should keep its promise and leave Galuak alone. Galuak himself showed little concern with what was going on. While prophet and spirit were conversing he removed the skin from over his head, walked casually about the hut looking for a pipe, and then filled it with tobacco and sat puffing at it by his father's side. The only part he took in the proceedings was to reply to a question put to him by his maternal uncle, that he had not had sexual relations with a kinswoman. It was thought advisable to make certain that there had been no incest because

they wanted to be sure that when *nai* and the other spirit had been satisfied there would be nothing further to prevent a speedy recovery. As for Rainen, if his manner of speech was that of a man out of his senses, its content showed reflection and purpose. What he, or the spirit in him, said was aimed at compelling Nhial to hand over his wages for the purchase from government herds of beasts for sacrifices, an object Rainen had been vainly trying to attain for some days previous to the ceremony. Rainen also justified himself, in what the spirit said, for the slaughter of a number of beasts to appease his various spirits, for which his family had criticized him for extravagance. They felt that too much of the family property was being devoted to religious purposes, whereas the spirit made it clear that, far from having made too many sacrifices, he had not made enough. Had he made more, Galuak would not have fallen sick. Religious and personal issues were interwoven in the spirit's declarations.

When the spirit had ceased speaking we left the hut, and Galuak's paternal uncle, Dol, went to chop down a branch of the 'wild date' (*Balanites aegyptiaca*), a tree to which *nai* is said to be very partial, to erect it as a shrine (*riek*) to the spirit near the hut. When it had been erected a clump of *tuat* grass was dug up by the roots and planted at the side of the branch in a hole first filled with water, it being the dry season. A he-goat—by this time one had been procured—was then brought out and the prophet waved his spear, decorated with ostrich plumes, over its back and made a short invocation, telling the spirit that they were honouring it, saying that it would now cease to trouble Galuak, and asking God that the people might rest in peace. He then cut the goat's throat. It was later eaten by himself and his two friends. The people of the homestead did not partake of its flesh, but when it had been cooked some children were called from a nearby homestead and given pieces of the meat and told to run back to their home with them. The Nuer said of this: *'ca gat kwoth nang cieng'*, 'the son of God is taken home'. Finally a *buor*, a mud mound in the shape of an ordinary kitchen windscreen, was erected near the shrine. On the following evening Rainen rubbed ashes on the back of a cow of his herd and dedicated it to the spirit of his father. By so doing he felt that he had appeased the second spirit which was troubling his son.

The relations between Nuer and their spirits centre in these

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and a number of kinsmen and neighbours were present, one of whom, Dhoal, was asked to preside because he was a leading man in the community. He began by pouring some of the beer out of the gourd over the tethering-peg of the cow devoted to *deng* when Karlual shouted to him to wait till they brought him a ladle. When it was brought, he poured a libation with it over the peg. A small son of Karlual was then told to do the same and afterwards to drink what was left in the ladle. Then various kinsmen also poured libations over the peg and all present poured beer into their hands and threw it into the air, an act called *kith*. The people then sat around the gourd and drank the remainder of the beer while they discussed family affairs.

All kinsmen who can do so should attend a ceremony of this kind, especially close agnatic kinsmen, for this is an occasion when kin are expected to reveal any resentment they may have in their hearts towards one another. Each tells the others where they have been at fault (*duer*) in speech or act during the past year, and the issues raised are then settled peacably by discussion. A man must not keep a grievance hidden, and if he does not reveal it now he must for ever keep silence. Nuer say that all the evil in their hearts is then blown away. I think that this is the meaning of the throwing of beer into the air. They also say '*giakni dial ba ke bap e yang*', 'all evils (which they have done to one another) will be gathered to (or taken over by) the cow'. All present place ashes on the back of the beast, probably an ox, and it is then cleansed by sprinkling or blowing beer on it. However, I did not see this part of the ceremony because owing to the lateness in starting it the beast had gone to pasture with the rest of the herd. I was told that it was performed in the afternoon when the herd returned from grazing.

III

In what I have said so far about the spirits of the air I have been speaking of their relations to ordinary Nuer. Sometimes a spirit possesses a man and when he has recovered from the seizure abides with him, giving him powers of healing, divination, exorcism, and foresight. I discuss the functions of these prophets in Chapter XII. Here I give only such information about them as is necessary for an appreciation of the spirits which possess them.

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are the *thep*-tree, papyrus, the *kwel*-tree (*Ficus platyphylla*), and *lel*, the doom palm.[1] 776 x 613

Some lineages respect rivers and streams. The ancestor of the [777] Juak lineage of western Nuerland, of Dinka descent, is said to [773] have come out of a big lagoon called *gwol*, so his descendants are known as Juak *jigwol* and the honorific titles of their sons and daughters are *gat* and *nya gwol*, son and daughter of (the lagoon) *gwol*. They respect all rivers and streams, and when a man of the lineage intends to cross a river he throws a bead into the water [782] calling on his 'grandfather' (the river-spirit) to accept the offering and bring him in safety to the other side. A woman of the lineage will not take off her skirt when crossing a river as other women do, and unmarried girls, who are naked, place a few wisps of grass round their loins before entering the water. I was told that were a married woman to forget and step into the water naked, and were then to remember her obligation, she would return to the bank and pull off a bead or tassel from her skirt and throw it into the water, telling the river-spirit that she had not purposely offended it and asking it to accept her offering in atonement. The [773] Gaatiek clan also respect rivers, and the Nile in particular because God brought their ancestor out of it. Being *jiyier*, river-people, they respect also the *gwot yier*, papyrus, and will not cut it. Their spear-names are *mut kier* and *mut yier*, spear of the Nile and spear of the river, and their honorific names are *gat* and *nya bar*, son and daughter of lagoon. They dedicate black cows to the Nile- 776 x spirit and they sometimes pour a libation of milk from these cows 613 into rivers. When people are taking their families and cattle across 782 rivers they milk one of the black cows dedicated to the river-spirit 791 into a black snail-shell, which a man of the clan then turns upside down at the river's edge and keeps pressed into the mud while the people and herds pass over. This keeps the jaws of the crocodiles closed. In virtue of their relationship to rivers certain senior members of the lineage may also perform a rite for the safety of those

[1] Mr. H. C. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 165, records that one of the clans of the Bul tribe respect the tree called in Arabic *durubu*, because their ancestor hid in this tree when fleeing from avengers. It is called *nir* in Nuer and is probably to be identified with *Pseudocedrela kotschyi*. Professor and Mrs. Seligman, *op. cit.*, p. 113, say that the *kur* tree is respected by the Bul Nuer because their miracle-working ancestor used to sit under it, and by the Jikiet clan because their ancestor was killed with clubs made of its wood. They do not on this occasion tell us the sources of their statements.

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Fig. 9
Club's
drawing
stick

taking part in fishing battues. Such a man is called *guan biedh*, owner of fish-spear, and *kuar juaini*, priest of grass, because he protects the people by winding grass round the point of a fishing-spear which he then drives into the earth. He also fills a snail-shell with mud and presses it into the mud of the river, and he bends and binds together the points of a metal bracelet and stamps it into the mud. He may also bind a goat and place it in the river as a sacrifice to the river-spirit, which he calls on to protect the people against the dangers of the water. I was told that he must not himself take part in the fishing, but must sit on the bank and abstain from drinking water. He can also heal wounds caused by fish-spears by spitting in them. The Gaatiek clan is probably of Dinka origin.

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The Nyanding river in the eastern Jikany country is the totem of a small lineage of Anuak descent who live on its banks. It is said that once upon a time the river-spirit asked for a bride, and a girl was decked for marriage and thrown into it by her father Juac, whose name means 'grass' in Nuer. This girl who was sacrificed to the river-spirit (*ca je kok yir*) was called Nyanding. I was told that 'she was not drowned, the river took her', and that she became part of the river-spirit. The present 'owner' of the river, Monytuk Joak, a man of this lineage, told me that each year he binds a goat and throws it into the river. He also protects people taking part in large-scale fishing by treating a bracelet and a shell in the manner I have described. When a girl of the lineage is married, a male goat and a female goat are paid as part of the bridewealth. The male goat is sacrificed to the river-spirit and the female goat is dedicated to it.

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Some Nuer lineages respect cattle with certain markings. The Kwok lineage of western Nuerland and their kinsmen among the Arwot people (a section of the Nuer who have to a large extent adopted Dinka culture) will not keep in their herds an animal with *ma bang* markings, that is an animal which has a coloured back but is otherwise white. If one is calved by their cows they

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a conception one has at least to consider all the situations in which it appears in a people's speech or thought. 776*

We have observed that a totemic or totemistic spirit sometimes gives a man certain powers over the totemic species. The rites these people perform might be classed, according to some definitions of the term, as magic, but in the Nuer classification, which is the one we have to follow if we are to delineate their thought and not our own, we are still concerned with a relationship between man and *kwoth*. Nevertheless, with diviners, leeches, owners of nature sprites, and owners of fetishes we are on the periphery of the conception of Spirit, where it becomes more and more embedded in the psychical and material. 776* 791● 785

Those who practice various forms of divination and leechcraft are known, as in other Nilotic languages, as *tiet*. Their powers come from some minor spirit, which is not, as I understood the Nuer, regarded as entering into and possessing a *tiet*, as spirits of the air and *colwic* possess men, but as having an external relationship to him. We may speak of Spirit so conceived of in relation to the exercise of his special powers as his familiar. If he did not have this familiar he would not be able to perform his functions, which are thought of as petty revelations of Spirit acting in an indirect manner through some traditional device.

The familiar spirits of these specialists may be totemic spirits, such as those of the tree cobra or the lion, but there may be no way of referring to them except in relation to the functions of the specialists, as the spirit of this or that kind of specialist. Nevertheless, they are always thought of on the pattern of the totemic and totemistic spirits, so that there is really little difference, except in manner of speech, between any *tiet* and such a person as performs rites to control crocodiles or durra-birds. Indeed, anyone who is credited with special powers over nature might be described as a *tiet*, which has the general sense of a person with such powers, a cunning man, so that, for example, the fact that a man has been able to acquire a wife with an unusually small payment of cattle suggests to Nuer the likelihood of his being a *tiet*. However, the word is generally used only for the skills I am about to mention, and a person with other but similar powers derived from a totemic or totemistic relationship who is not so called is spoken of as *gwan kwoth*, owner of a spirit (of whatever it may be). In either case, the familiar may be inherited from father to son.

•791 755 The best-known sort of *tiet* is the *tiet gweni*. He divines by throwing mussel shells on the convex surface of a gourd and studying the way they fall. By this means he answers such questions as whether a man will find a lost cow, have success on a journey, or slay a victim in a blood-feud, and whether, if he is on a journey, all at home is well. While engaged in throwing the shells he speaks to his familiar spirit, which is associated with the gourd, perhaps being regarded as in it during the seance. Another sort of specialist of this order is the *tiet dala*. I was told that some of his functions are to aid a man to recover cattle by performing a rite to make the herdsmen inattentive, to aid a man to recover a runaway wife, to win female favours, to exact vengeance in blood-feud, and to avoid enemy spears in fighting. Another sort is the *tiet me ngwet*. She—all I heard of were women—is a leech who removes objects from the bodies of sick persons which have been put there by a *peth*, a witch or possessor of the evil eye. Another sort is the *tiet me monye dholi*, a leech who massages constipated children with his spittle. Other sorts of *tiet* treat barren women, impotent men, and sick calves; and there may be yet others with minor skills.

Nuer do not highly regard these people and have small confidence in them. They are little men and women who perform their petty rites for the benefit of their immediate neighbours and for inconsiderable rewards. They never achieve social prominence, far less tribal renown, and their possession of special powers is not likely to be known outside their own village or its immediate vicinity. But, apart from this, they are regarded as being in themselves something very humble and of quite a different class and order from the prophets, who, whether they achieve great renown or not, are inspired by spirits of the above, whereas these diviners and leeches and other specialists of the same order merely have little spirits of the below as familiars. Were this not to be made clear there would be a danger that Nuer religious ideas and practices might be viewed in false perspective, for they are not all of the same significance for Nuer. Some are important and some are unimportant, and they are of different kinds and of different orders. It was because this was not appreciated by British administrators that the role and nature of the prophets was very largely misunderstood and their treatment of them ill-considered (pp. 303-7). Nuer do not regard all manifestations of Spirit as of equal value, nor do they accept all claims to spiritual guidance at their face value.